Summer Pampering in the City

Backyard photo by Sharon Maynard

Visit your favorite bakery, or prepare a frozen yummy the evening before your mini spa-cation. Enjoy a one-woman dessert salon

*Best used when you want to spend a day indoors because (a) the temperature is pushing 90 degrees and/or (b) people are screwing with your nerves.

The following story is either about beauty traditions and self-care, or it's about how people can be such assholes. In either case, it is a true tale.

Storytime: A Puzzling Tradition

Knowingly, unknowingly, or maybe apathetically, Mom and Sis showed me all manners of treatments and techniques. After bathing, they stood before the mirror and rubbed cocoa butter or other goo into their faces and limbs. What does that do, I asked. It was good for the skin, they said and left it at that. During hot, sleeveless weather, exposed armpits had to be hairless. Hair removal was done in secret, and I was too young to connect naked armpits with the bottle of Nair on the dresser. Long nails and long hair were marks of femininity. Hating the taste of unflavored gelatin, Mom winced as she sipped hot cups of the liquid every night. Watching Mom drink the stuff was even more entertaining than watching a Bugs Bunny cartoon.

Some of those treatments proved to have timeless merit in my adult years – even if I had to alter the recipe a bit. For example, cocoa butter was an excellent magical ointment if you wanted pimples and blackheads to erupt on your face and shoulders. I later learned almond oil or jojoba oil formed a barrier between moisture and evaporation.* Besides, the mosquitoes and other pests found me less tasty after I rubbed the stuff into my skin. Probably some pharaohs discovered this treatment after walking too closely to the royal ponds and gardens. Not only did oil convince insects not to bite, but also it slowed down the aging process of the

skin! Impressive! Shaving mitigated the smell of rank armpits. Less caustic and less foul-smelling, a man's electrical shaver surpassed a chemical depilatory in desirability. Long fingernails became useless to me, feminine attributes or no. In my later years, I joined a dojo that discouraged long nails, lest unintentional scratches lacerated unprotected skin. Besides, as a youth I had cringed at older women's claws, for the layers of keratin seemed to emphasize the loose skin and mishappen fingers.

*Fortunately or unfortunately, I am one of those women who was cursed – or blessed-- with oily and sensitive facial skin. ANY oil spelled bad news for me.

Some people sure make a stink about Hair

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Enter the passage on hair fixation, the bringer of misery for many a decade. Mom and Carolyn flaunted thick,

bountiful hair. Their crowns withstood punishment after punishment and emerged like a champion heavyweight. Unfortunately for me – and I have no doubt about the misfortunate in this case -- I ran into a well-meaning (?) "auntie" who evidently thought manes could not be beautiful unless they had been patterned after the styles of European-American celebrities shown on television and magazines. In my adulthood, I learned this aunt was one of my dad's side asses in a courtyard of asses. Maybe the catastrophic results of that perm funded by Aunt Rene was payback for the knowledge that she would never attain the enviable (?) status of "wife" in the heaven of carnal delights.

Because of comments overheard about my burnt-out tresses, I realized a vocal population with a strong interest in hair, its length and the amount of curl in the strand, existed in the segregated African-American community. Hardly anyone seemed to notice my head until it resembled a peach with little straw to spare. Both Black men and Black women seemed to have an opinion on "short, nappy" hair and "good" hair, and this struck me as a phenomenon. Black men didn't seem to comment on the softness of a woman's skin or the length of her fingernails, but they damn sure commented on what she had on the roof. Perhaps during the antebellum period, slave owners had fucked with the slaves about their hair to the extent that slaves began to fuck with each other about hair. Maybe in the lands of black people before the Trans-Atlantic trade, hair equaled wealth. Who knew what brewed this mindset? At the same time, I noticed that mothers

possessed a penchant for weaving their elementary school-aged daughters' locks into braids. Damn near every girl wore braids. If you wielded longer, looser curls, then your mom may have let you off with two to four braids. If you had shorter curls, then your mom loaded you with a lot more braids. Even through this period of learning how to hate my short spirals, I wondered why in the Hell did moms put so many braids in their daughters' hair?

View of Front porch photo by Sharon Maynard

In the years that followed, I lived in neighborhoods unlike the one in which I grew up. African-American beauticians were scarce, and the European-American beauticians refused to work on "African-American"

coifs. They didn't mind applying facial masks, tweezing eyebrows, or performing pedicures, however. When I asked two Anglos why they refused services on hair like mine, they replied with the same answers; cosmetology schools did not provide courses on black hair. Without benefit of education, they had tried to provide service to African-American clients, and their attempts ended in disaster. A black beautician confirmed this. Because schools did not offer courses, black hairdressers learned by trial – and major error, judging from the amount of women who suffered hair loss through weaves, perms, and hot combs.

Soon after digesting that knowledge, I closed the chapter on white beauticians, black beauticians, and whatever else that could be found in "beauty" salons. Hell, if anyone were to gamble with my hair, it would be me. I would be content with my four "French" braids.

Decades later, the corona virus raked its talons across the US. The university's administrators directed all non-essential employees to work at home. Venturing outside was taking a chance on catching covid-19. During this period I learned two things: (a) Working at home and not attending aikido classes were damn fine ways to gain weight (our dojo suspended classes due to the virus) and (b) If you became bored as Hell, Youtube provided good entertainment. Those years of watching my mom and sister preen in the mirror must have made fine memories, for eventually I found myself watching clips of women exhibiting their skin care routines. I did not find these recordings terribly enlightening because these young women possessed no information that

benefitted hags-in-the-making. On the other hand, the amount of products the women used astonished me. Why buy an expensive tube of exfoliator and an over-priced jar of wax and oil (a.k.a. moisturizing cream) when a diy sugar scrub would give you the same effect? From curiosity, I went from skin care to hair maintenance videos. To my delight, the amount of natural hair videos exceeded the amount of "Get your hair straighter than straight. Even the white chicks will ask how you got your hair that straight" videos. Or maybe I disregarded the latter clips. In either case, thank Goodness these young women o' the coil-y tresses refused to buy into the hatred of what grew out of their follicles. On these young women, four braids, eight braids, and even 12 braids looked beautiful. After watching their videos, I immediately set to work fashioning my hair into the once disliked 8 braids.

Now the puzzle of the multi-plaits made sense.

For those of us whose hair formed spirals as it grew, the multi-braid hairstyle was a way of avoiding the punishment of having your hair ripped out. The more sections of hair your mom, sister, or auntie created, the easier she could remove tangles and knots without pulling out a comb full of hair. Also, the plethora of plaits did not put a great amount of tension on the "edges" – the areas that a fair amount of African-American Youtubers had surrendered to the altar of too tight cornrolls, severe upsweeps, tight braids, overly twisted dreds and questionably cared for weaves. The

straightening comb or “perms” made sense but only to a point; the heat or chemical process eliminated the tangles associated with kinky hair. In some cases, the process contributed to the elimination of said hair. I marveled. A tradition survived the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, even if the knowledge behind that tradition had not been explained by grandmother to mother – or from mother to me! With this bit of background, I realized why the grandmothers of my childhood had the legendary “hair damn near long and thick enough to sit on.” The beauty circle had been joined, so to speak.

Let’s Move On To Pampering…

(which is what this zine is suppose to be about, anyway)

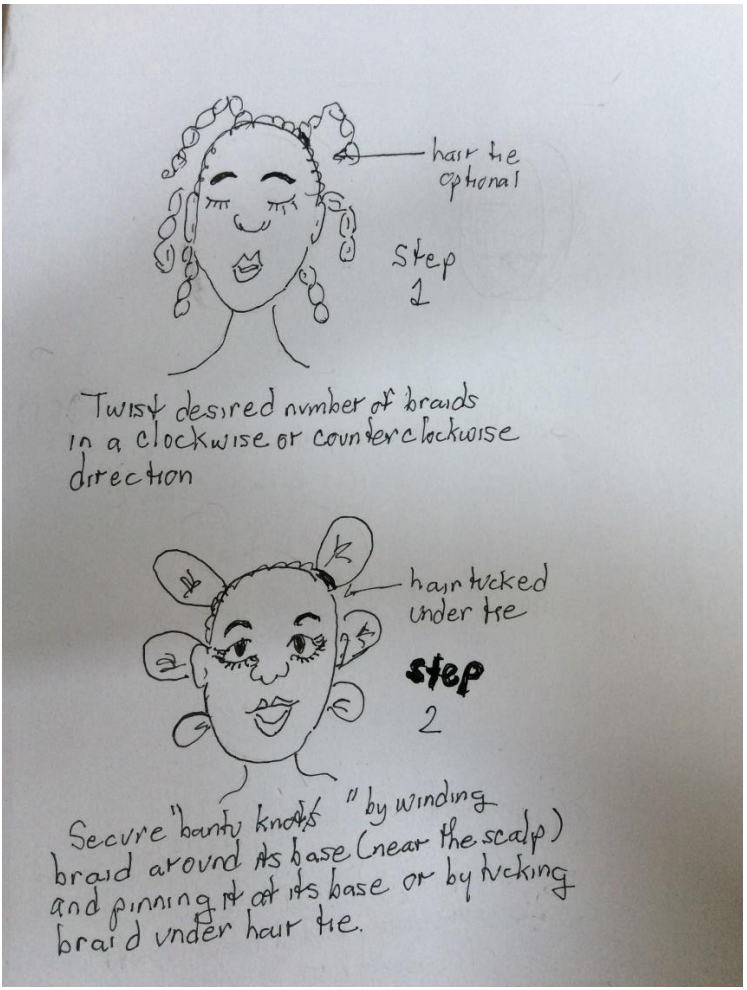
It took me far too long to realize that when a woman wants a diy spa treatment, then she should look to the ancient east. Until she embarks in her time-traveling ship to visit an eastern spa, however, she may feel free to try some of these treatments and practices:

1) Keep a teapot of green tea in the fridge. Keep pitchers of water in there, too. Drinking water is one of the best pampering and beauty treatments you’ll enjoy.
2) Try a new type of greens in your salads if your diet permits. If you want to slow down

encroaching wrinkles, then sprinkle walnuts in your salads. Wear a hat or shield your face with an umbrella.

3) Eat yogurt for bright eyes. Buy organic and plain yogurt, and top it off with fresh fruit.
4) When you feel sweaty and sticky, wipe a cold cucumber slice over your face.
5) Try fresh or dried fruit as snacks. Keep dark chocolate as rewards.
6) During your next book-buying spree, buy a journal whether or not you need one. When you need a new journal, write, draw, or glue stuff in the journal you purchased during your book-buying spree.
7) Re-read your finished journal after 2 years. Have things changed much since then?
8) Do a 4-week snail mail fest. During the fest, mail out a letter or packet every week.
9) Have a ritual that makes your bones strong and your joints supple.
10) Go thrift shopping for clothes during the "off" season in the store where you usually shop. During the late June through mid-July, you may find sweaters at a reduced price.
11) Read a book or blog on debt elimination. Given the idea that the economy is a fluid beast, you may wish to read several books or blogs. This may serve you better than point number 10. if you have gotten carried away with the preceding point.

Crash Course on Bantu Knots (Directions follow illustration)


hair tie optional
Step 1
Twist desired number of braids in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction
hair tucked under tie
step 2
Secure "bantu knots" by winding braid around its base (near the scalp) and pinning it at its base or by tucking braid under hair tie.

1) Section off a portion of hair.

2) Fashion section into braid or double strand twist. If you choose hair ties, then place tie near base of braid (close to scalp). Twist braid in counterclockwise or clockwise direction. Secure braid by tucking braid's end or twist's end under tie.
3) When using hair pin, twist braid (or double strand twist) in counter clockwise or clockwise direction. Secure "knot" by pinning close to scalp.

I love trading zines, especially perzines and witchy zines. If you want to trade zines, then holla with me at:

October Tea Society

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If you want to say hi, then drop by and leave a comment, so that I can visit you at your zine-related blog, witchy and otherwise.

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